

## **EXHIBIT 1**

4/20/2020

FBI seizes computer, cell phone from home of Denver businessman Brian Watson

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# FBI seizes computer, cell phone from home of Denver businessman

Brian Watson ran for state treasurer on the Republican ticket in 2018

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The FBI served a search warrant at the home of a prominent Denver businessman last week as part of a grand jury investigation.

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Joe Amon, The Denver Post

Brian Watson, then a Republican candidate for Colorado Treasurer, delivers his concession speech on Nov. 6, 2018 in Lone Tree.

Several agents seized a computer and a cell phone from the home of Brian Watson, the founder of Northstar Commercial Partners and a former Republican candidate for state treasurer who has faced criticism in the past for his business dealings.

"We don't know what the FBI is looking into," said Stan Garnett, Watson's attorney. "But he vigorously denies that he did anything wrong. The FBI visit was a surprise."

Watson declined to comment Tuesday and directed questions to Garnett, who said that a "handful" of FBI agents visited Watson's home for about an hour Thursday.

Garnett declined to discuss what was detailed in the search warrant and said business at Northstar Commercial Partners was going on as normally as possible during the global novel coronavirus pandemic.

In an April 2 email obtained by the Denver Post Tuesday, Watson wrote to family members and business partners that the FBI agents told him the investigation was about fraud and misappropriation of funds and was connected to the company's work with Amazon data centers.

"Needless to state, I was scared, shocked, and devastated," he wrote in the emotional and lengthy email, in which he repeatedly declared that he was innocent of wrongdoing.

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Watson speculated in the email that the FBI could be investigating a “referral agreement” in which Watson paid a friend \$4,000 a month to research large companies that have real estate needs and introduce Watson to those companies. The friend, paid as an independent contractor, introduced Watson to Amazon, according to the email, which said some funds from the deal were funneled back to the referrer.

Watson wrote that the FBI could also be looking into a 2019 deal made by two Northstar employees — since fired — who Watson wrote “placed a parcel of land in Virginia under contract for \$96 million and flipped a few weeks later for \$116 million, making approximately \$20 million behind my back.”



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In the email, he said he fired the employees when he learned about the deal and took legal action against them.

Watson called the FBI investigation a “witch hunt” and wrote in the email that he suspected a disgruntled former employee or associate may have reported Northstar to the federal agency.

Garnett declined to comment on the email.

Watson, who narrowly lost a bid for election as the state’s treasurer in 2018, has previously been accused of bad business dealings, like failing to pay vendors, and has faced several lawsuits, one as recently as November.

Garnett on Tuesday defended Watson’s work.

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“People make allegations here and there and sometimes lawsuits get filed, but there has never been anything like this in the past,” Garnett said of the visit from the FBI. “Brian has worked very hard to operate a high level of ethics and integrity and believes he has done that.”

The FBI did not immediately return a request for comment Tuesday.

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Shelly Bradbury is a breaking news reporter who joined The Denver Post in November 2019. She previously worked as a crime reporter at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in Pennsylvania and the Chattanooga Times Free Press in Tennessee. She's been a reporter since 2012, focused on criminal justice, breaking news and enterprise. In Pittsburgh, she helped the newspaper earn the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for breaking news after a mass shooting at a local synagogue.

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